

REFLECTIONS FOR THE 17TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 30 July 2023

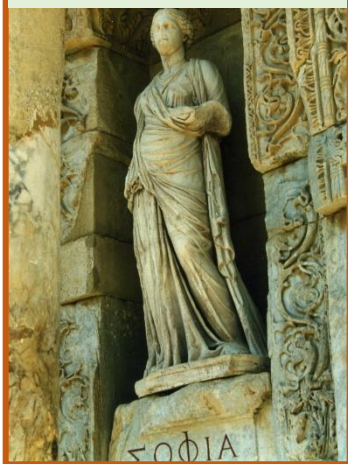
The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

Listen! Wisdom is calling!
Before all began, God , Word, and Wisdom
Creating, calling, from the foundations of the deep
Listen! Wisdom is calling!
From the mountain tops, Earth, fields and sea
Creating, calling from the foundations of the deep
Listen! Wisdom is calling!
To those who suffer God's love is given
Endurance blossoms from the foundations of the deep
Listen! Wisdom is calling!
Daily, God's delight, you, me, every one
Given hope, grace, love as the foundation of our lives
Listen! Wisdom is calling!
Poured into our hearts that we may become
Christ's hand and heart, love as the foundation of our lives
Listen! Wisdom is calling!

~ Terri, RevGalBlogPals

Today's readings from the Liturgy of the Word on the 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time dare us to trust that "Wisdom is calling!" God's conversation with Solomon in the first reading, verses of the Torah Psalm 119, Jesus' parables in Matthew's Gospel, and the insightful words of Paul in Romans are all centered on the gift of wisdom, poured out abundantly and steadfastly by God on all created beings.

**Personification of Sophia
2nd Century, Ephesus**



Wisdom is personified as female in the Hebrew Scriptures – *Hokmah* (חִכְמָה in Hebrew) and Sophia (Σοφία in Greek). Woman Wisdom is described beautifully in the Wisdom of Solomon, "For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of God's goodness. Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets; for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom" (Ws 7:26-28).

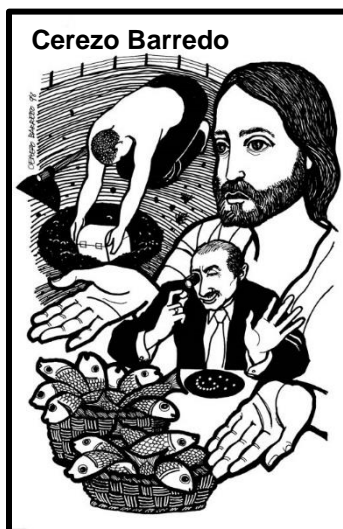
Solomon is the person of the Hebrew Scriptures most identified with Wisdom – he is traditionally named as the author of the Wisdom books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom, and several wisdom psalms (they were actually written many years after his reign). Solomon says of Wisdom, "I loved her and sought her from my youth" (Ws 8:2) and goes on to say, "in kinship with wisdom there is immortality, and in friendship with her, pure delight, and in the labours of her hands, unfailing wealth, and in the experience of her company, understanding, and renown in sharing her words" (Ws 8:17-18). Jesus recognizes the connections between Solomon and wisdom when he says, "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!" (Matt 12:42).

In today's passage from 1 Kings, God and the young king Solomon have a conversation in which Solomon acknowledges that his father David had walked in the ways of God and God offers Solomon whatever gifts he needs to be a good king. In response Solomon asks for wisdom "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?" (1 Kgs 3:9). God says to him, "[because you] have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind" (1 Kgs 3:11-12). God grants Solomon the gift of wisdom, but God also cautions Solomon to "do according to your word." Sadly, we know that Solomon does not remain faithful to his word or to God's gift but, later in his life, he is negatively influenced by the culture, expectations, and structures of his time and fails to walk in the way of the Lord. This is a caution for us that God gives the gift of wisdom freely and abundantly; we have to accept that gift, live it faithfully, repent when we fail, and turn back to our wise and loving God.



Psalms 119, together with Psalms 1 and 19, is a Torah psalm. It begins with the words, "Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord." The English translation of the word "Torah" is quite limiting given our legal understanding of law and commandments. However, in the Hebrew scriptures, Torah refers to a whole way of being, a way of walking in God's way, a way of seeing with God's eyes. This very long Psalm 119 (176 verses) echoes this interconnection throughout. In the verses chosen for today's Liturgy, we see the word "Torah" intertwined with God's steadfast love, mercy, and promise (vv. 76-77).

The psalmist proclaims that Torah is worth more than thousands of gold and silver pieces, worth more than fine gold (vv. 72 and 127). Even more, the psalmist, echoing Solomon's words from the book of Wisdom, says to God that "your law is my delight" (v. 77) and "truly I love your commandments more than gold, more than fine gold" (v. 127). And the psalmist knows what Solomon failed to acknowledge, "I promise to keep your words" (v. 57). Today's passage ends with the comforting words that reflect Torah and wisdom and endorse that this gift is for all of us, "The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple" (Ps 119:130).



Parables are one of the rich resources that convey wisdom by means of a brief story that directly engages the listener by linking the real world (known to the listener) to an underlying truth. In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus frequently uses such wisdom teaching. In today's passage from the Gospel of Matthew, we continue the series of parables by which Jesus is teaching the disciples about the kin-dom of heaven not as an abstract or future happening but as a reality in their time. In this part of the series, we hear three very brief parables. Using the unlikely images of a buried treasure, a pearl of great price, and a fishing net, Jesus teaches that the kin-dom of heaven is here among us; we have to actively choose to accept and live it. We have to choose to walk in the way of the Lord as we learned from the story in 1 Kings and from Psalm 119. It is a personal choice (the buried treasure and the pearl of great price) and a communal choice (the fishing net).

The choice is not an easy one as we see from the story of Solomon. In the parables, the one who finds the treasure buried in the field and the one who sees the pearl of great price are willing to sell all that they have to get what they deeply desire. All of us have chosen to accept and live the kin-dom of God. Do we take time to ponder what a priceless gift from God this is? What is the price that we have paid? Have we been willing to give all that we have to live in this kin-dom?

The parable of the treasure buried in the field causes us to think even more deeply. Does the one who finds the treasure mislead the original owner by buying the whole field without disclosing the treasure it contains? Or does the owner find no value in what the other finds so valuable and skillfully demands that the whole field be purchased?

The third parable tells a different truth. The net is cast wide to include fish of every kind. This sense of inclusion is coming so much more into our awareness as Christians and as Roman Catholics. The *Synod on Synodality* has focused on this in a special way. The symbol of the Synod shows the diversity of people led by the child and the adolescent. The document for the Continental Assemblies was entitled "Enlarge the space of your tent." Article 40 of that document states:



Despite the cultural differences, there are remarkable similarities between the various continents regarding those who are perceived as excluded, in society and also in the Christian community. In many cases their voice has been absent from the synod process, and they appear in reports only because others speak about them, lamenting their exclusion: "As the Bolivian Church, we are saddened that we have not been able to effectively reach out to the poor on the peripheries and in the most remote places" (EC Bolivia). Among the most frequently mentioned excluded groups are: the poorest, the lonely elderly, indigenous peoples, migrants without any affiliation and who lead a precarious existence, street children, alcoholics and drug addicts, those who have fallen into the plots of criminality and those for whom prostitution seems their only chance of survival, victims of trafficking, survivors

of abuse (in the Church and beyond), prisoners, groups who suffer discrimination and violence because of race, ethnicity, gender, culture and sexuality. In the reports, ***all of them appear as people with faces and names, calling for solidarity, dialogue, accompaniment and welcome.***

In his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to God's purpose" (Rom 8:28) and goes on to speak about those whom God has predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son. Steve Garnaas-Holmes echoes so powerfully what the Synod says above about all who are included, all with faces and names:

And whom does God predestine?

All of us, dear.

Every single one of us, saintly and wretched alike,
is destined to be drawn into the love of God,
forgiven deeply and perfectly,

and made to shine with the radiance of God's beauty.
Our outward behavior may or may not show it.
We may or may not realize it, or believe it, or want it.
But unseen, our destiny as God's chosen ones
unfolds inexorably.
Pray that you may trust the gift,
and that you may walk through the crowded market
with such eyes.

"In every generation she [Woman Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God, and prophets" (Wis 7:27). This week let us take time to rejoice in Woman Wisdom who walks with us every single day if we choose to allow her to do so. Let us remember that walking together with Woman Wisdom means walking together with those who are far too often excluded – by us personally or by our church or by our society. Whom will you walk with this week?

Thom Shuman brings our reflections today to an end with his poem-prayer:

You shape us in your image,
not so we would puff up with pride, but we might humbly serve others.
You have chosen us, not because we are so special,
but that we might become hope to a world bloated on despair.
Searcher of hearts, we would tell of all your wonders.

You went and sold your life,
so you could buy us back from sin and death.
You planted seeds of grace, so that the lost, the little,
the least, the last, and even we could make our homes in you.
Bearer of God's Heart, we would tell all your stories.

You offer sighs from the depths
of the very heart of God, when we cannot shape words.
With peace in your hands, you step in to help resolve all of our broken relationships.
Heart of reconciliation, we would listen to your hopes.

God in Community, Holy in One, we would tell of your presence in us.

